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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SHOPPING FESTIVAL OPENING DAY REFLECTS ECONOMIC
RESURGENCE IN NABLUS

REF: JERUSALEM 1079

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On July 18, the Consul General attended the opening-day events of the Nablus Shopping Festival, joining Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Nablus Governor Jamal al-Muhaysen in a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Tens of thousands of Palestinians thronged the city center, celebrating a day of shopping, cultural events, and entertainment, including an attempt to certify a 75 meter-long kunafe (an Arab dessert made famous in Nablus) as a Guinness world record. The Consul General also toured a new shopping mall and a new cinema, the first to open in the West Bank since all closed during the first intifada. Festival organizers and Nablus business contacts said that the festival celebrates the strong security and economic progress achieved there over the past two years. End Summary.

Shopping Festival Celebrates Progress in Nablus

¶2. (SBU) The Consul General traveled to Nablus on July 18 for the opening of the Nablus Shopping Festival. According to festival organizers, the month-long event celebrates economic and security progress in Nablus in the past two years. The organizers also noted the recent easing of access and movement restrictions at checkpoints surrounding the city (reftel). Event organizers said they hope to attract Arab-Israelis and investors back to the city.

First Nablus Movie Theater Opens Since First Intifada

¶3. (SBU) The Consul General joined Prime Minister Fayyad and Nablus Governor Jamal al-Muhaysen in a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a project to upgrade traffic infrastructure in the center of the city, followed by a tour of a new multi-level mall that includes a newly-opened cinema. The cinema, a USD two million investment, currently shows Arabic language (mostly Egyptian) films, but owners say they are working to acquire U.S. movies. The cinema's general manager Bashir al-Shaqah told the Consul General that he hopes this will be the first of many theaters, "not just in Nablus, but throughout the West Bank."

Festival Reflects PA Security and Economic Achievements

¶4. (SBU) A number of ConGen business contacts said that the festival reflects the significant, positive changes in Nablus' security and economic environment over the past two years. They noted that such an event would have been impossible to organize before the deployment of PA security

forces in November 2007 improved security in the city. The festival, they said, is the latest sign of an economic revival in Nablus that has been assisted by the gradual easing at checkpoints surrounding the city. They expressed hope that the positive economic momentum will be sustained and could lead to further easing of access and movement restrictions in the Nablus region. The Consul General highlighted these themes in several print and television interviews during the day, in which he credited the PA for increasing security performance and promoting economic development over the past two years.

WALLES